

R. B. Anquetil M. (afterwards Lord Bishop of Exeter)
LETTER

TO

The Rev. Mr. WESLEY

ON THE DEATH

OF

The Rev. Mr. FLETCHER,

Vicar of Madeley

IN

SHROPSHIRE.

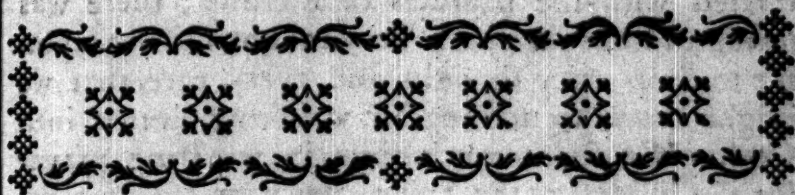
Blessed are the Dead who die in the Lord: even so
saith the Spirit; for they rest from their Labours
and their works do follow them.

M A D E L E Y:

Printed by J. EDMUNDS.

Enter'd at Stationer's Hall.





A

L E T T E R

To the Revd. Mr. WESLEY.

August 18th, 1785.

Revd. and very dear Sir,

THO' but Yesterday I parted with my beloved Hulband's Remains, I must now endeavour to collect my wounded mind, as I would not have any of his words fall to the ground, and give if possible some account of the awful, but to him glorious Scene.

Our Union increased daily, as did his health and strength; his Consumptive Complaint appear'd quite remov'd, and in my eyes the bitterness of Death was past.—The work was sweetly prospering, and in a variety of circumstances the Sun of prosperity shone around us.

For

For some time before this last illness, his precious Soul (always alive to God) was particularly penetrated with the nearness of Eternity; there was scarce an hour in which he was not calling upon me to drop every thought and every care, that we might attend to nothing but drinking deeper into God. We spent much time in wrestling prayer for the fullness of the Spirit, and were led, in a very peculiar manner, to an act of *abandonment* (as we call'd it) of our whole selves into the hands of God, to do or suffer whatever was pleasing to him. On Thursday August 4th he was taken up in the work of God from three in the afternoon, till nine at night; when he came home he said, I have taken Cold—Friday and Saturday he was but poorly tho' he went out part of the day, but seem'd uncommonly drawn out in Prayer. On Saturday night his Fever first appear'd very strong—I beg'd him not to go to the Church in the Morning, but let a pious Brother who was here Preach in the Yard; but he told me it was the will of the Lord, and that he was assured it was right he should go; in which case I never dared to perswade. As I was in the morning with a little Company of our pious Women, I begg'd they would pray that he might be strengthened, and that I might have a grain of that faith which supported the faithful when their friends were Martyr'd. In reading Prayers he almost fainted away—I got thro' the Crowd, with a friend, and intreated him to come out of the Desk, as did some others; but he let us know in his sweet manner, we were not to interrupt the order of God. I then retired to my Pew, where all around me were

in tears. When he was a little refresh'd by the Windows being open'd, and a Nofegay thrown into the Desk by a friend, he went on; and afterwards going up into the Pulpit, Preach'd with a strength and recollection which surpris'd us all.

In his first Prayer he said, "Lord thou wilt manifest thy Strength in Weakness, we confer not with flesh and blood, but put our trust under the Shadow of thy Wings."

His Text was from Psalm 36 "Thou Lord shalt save both man and beast; how Excellent is thy mercy, O God: and the Children of Men shall put their trust under the shadow of thy Wings."

After he had pointed out the Saviour of Mankind, and observed how some by Sin had made themselves beasts, he shew'd that the Promise, even in that sense, might be apply'd to the sinner as well as to the beasts of the Earth: and in speaking to these, with his usual earnestness, he *prest*, *invited*, and *intreated* them to return unto God, enforcing those words of our Lord when he came near to Jerusalem and Wept over it—"If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine Eyes." These words peculiarly pierced the hearts of many, as they have since told me. He continu'd to observe in nearly the following words, "that the Wings of the Lord, are compared to those of an Eagle for strength and protection Exodus 19. "I bare you on Eagles Wings and brought you unto myself." And to those of a Hen for Love and Care, "Like as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings." In the Jewish Tabernacle where was the Holy of Holies,

lies, two Cherubim were placed; whose extended Wings joining together overshadow'd the Mercy-seat; the Face of the one was like an Ox, and the Face of the other like a Man;—The first representing by its strength the Power of God,—the other Christs Humanity.—When he Died upon the Cross, his arms were stretch'd out, and these were the Wings of Love which he open'd, and still holds wide open to receive all that come unto him; let us then, when we see his Love and Power thus united to save and bless us, enter boldly into the Holy of Holies thro' the Door of Divine Mercy. A friend threw *me* some flowers to revive me when I was faint, but the mercy of the Lord is far more reviving;—It is this I would hold out to you, and drop it into your very Bosoms; may it sink deep there, that you may taste and see how good the Lord is, and confess that his saving mercy is above the richest perfume, for he saves both Man and Beast”!

After Sermon he went up the Aisle to the Communion Table, with these words, “I am going to “throw myself under the Wings of the Cherubim “before the Mercy-seat.”

The Congregation was Large, and the Service held till near two. Sometimes he could scarcely stand, and was often obliged to stop for want of Power to speak. The People were deeply affected—weeping was on every side. Gracious Lord! how was it my soul was kept so calm in the midst of the most tender feelings. Notwithstanding his *extream* weakness he gave out several verses of Hymns, and various lively sentences of Exhortation. As soon as the service was over, we hurried him away to his Bed, were he immediately fainted away.

away. He afterwards dropp'd into a sleep for some time, and upon waking cry'd out with a pleasant smile—"Now My Dear, thou seest I am no worse for doing the Lords work, he never fails me when I trust in him." After he had got a little Dinner he dozed most of the Evening—now and then waking (as was usual with him) full of the Praises of God. That night his Fever return'd, but not so bad as on Saturday; nevertheless from Sunday his strength decreas'd amazingly. On Monday and Tuesday we had a little Paradise together; he lay on a Couch in the Study and was at times very restless, as to change of Posture, but sweetly Pleasant, and often slept for a good while. When awake, he delighted much in hearing me read hymns and tracts on Faith and Love. His words were all animating and his patience beyond expression. When he had any bitter or nauseous Medicine to take, he seem'd to enjoy the Cross, reminding me of a word he used often to repeat; that our business was to seek a perfect conformity to the will of God, and then leave him to give us what comfort he saw good. I ask'd him, if he should be taken from me, whether he had any particular directions or orders to give me, since I desired to form my whole life thereby. He reply'd "No, not by *mine*, the Holy Ghost shall direct thee; I have nothing particular to say, only that the Lord will open all before thee;—but beware of such and such, and let not any one bring thee into bondage. If I stay with thee, I will keep thee from oppression, but if I should be taken from thee, beware of them." I said hast thou any conviction the Lord is about to take thee.—He answer'd "No, not in particular, only I always see
"death

"death so inexpressibly near, that we both seem to stand as on the very verge of Eternity." While he slept a little, I laid my trial before the Lord, intreating him, if it was his good pleasure, to spare my beloved husband a little longer; but my prayer seem'd to have no Wings,—it was held down, and I could not help mingling continually therewith, Lord give me perfect resignation: This uncertainty in my own mind made me rather tremble, least the Lord was going to take the bitter Cup out of my Dear's hand and give it unto me. The Cup of separation, he had for some Weeks before very deeply drank of, when I myself was ill of the Fever. At that time he often pass'd thro' the whole parting scene, and struggled for the fortitude of perfect resignation. Sometimes he would say at that season, "O Polly! shall I ever see the day when thou must be carried out to bury. How will the little things, thou wast accusom'd to use and all those which thy tender care has prepared for me in every part of the House, how will they wound and distress me! How is it? I think I feel jealousy—I am jealous of the Worm! I seem to shrink at giving my dear Polly to the Worms."

Now all these reflections return'd with a Millstone's weight on my heart. I cry'd to the Lord, and those words were deeply impressed on my spirit, "*Where I am, there shall my servants be, that they may behold my Glory.*" This Promise was full of matter as well as unction to my Soul. It explain'd itself thus—that in *Christ's immediate* presence was our home, and that we should find our reunion in being deeply center'd in him. I received it as a fresh Marriage for eternity. As such I still take and

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trust forever to hold it. All that day whenever I thought of this Expression, "*to behold my Glory,*" it seem'd to wipe every tear away, and was as the ring by which we were join'd anew.

Awaking sometime after, he said, "Polly, I will tell you what I have been thinking of—it was Israel's fault that they ask'd for signs: we will not do so; but abandoning our whole selves into the Hands of God, we will there lie patiently before him, assur'd that he will do all things well."

My dear Love, said I, if ever I have done or said any thing to grieve thee, how will the remembrance wound my heart, shouldst thou be taken from me.

He intreated and charged me, with inexpressible tenderness, not to allow the thought; declaring his thankfulness for our union, in a variety of words written on my heart, as with the adamantine pen of friendship deeply dipt in blood.

On Wednesday, after groaning all day, as it were under the Weight of the Power of God, he told me, he had receiv'd such a manifestation of the full meaning of that word, "*God is Love,*" as he could never be able to tell. "*It fills me,*" said he; "*it fills me every moment. O Polly! my dear Polly! God is Love! Shout, Shout aloud—Oh! it so fills me, I want a gust of Praise to go to the ends of the Earth. But it seems as if I could not speak much longer; let us fix on a sign between ourselves*" (tapping me twice with his dear Finger) "*now I mean God is Love, and we will draw each other into God: Observe! by this we will draw each other into God.*"

Sally coming in, he cry'd out, "*O Sally! God is Love! shout both of you;—I want to hear you shout his praise.*" Indeed it was a season of

love. All this time, the medical Friend who attended him, with unwearied diligence hop'd he was in no danger; he knew it to be the Fever, but as he had no bad Head-ach, much sleep without the *least delirium*, and an almost regular Pulse, seldom much quicker than my own, he thought the symptoms amazingly kind; for tho' the disease was commision'd to take his Life, yet it seem'd so restrain'd by the Power of God, that we truly discern'd in it the verity of those words, "Death is yours."

On Thursday his speech began to fail. While he was able, he continued speaking to all who came in his way; accidentally hearing that a Stranger was in the House, he order'd her to be call'd up, tho' uttering two sentences almost made him faint. To his friendly Doctor, he would not be silent while he had any Power of Speech; often saying "O Sir, you take much thought for my Body, give me leave to take thought for your Soul." And I believe his words will remain with that Friend for ever. When I could scarcely understand any thing he said, I spake these words, *God is Love!* instantly he catch'd them, as if all his Powers were awaken'd afresh, and broke out in a rapture "*God is Love Love Love!* O for that gust of Praise I want to sound."—Here his dear voice again fail'd. He was restless and often suffer'd many ways, but with such patience, as none but those who were with him can conceive; if I nam'd his sufferings—he would smile and make the sign.

On Friday, finding *his dear body* cover'd with spots, I so far understood them, as to feel a Sword pierce thro' my Soul. As I was kneeling by his bed, with my hand in his, intreating the Lord to be

with

with us in this tremendous hour, he strove to say many things, but could not: pressing my hand and often repeating the sign, at last he breath'd out "*Head of the Church, be head to my Wife.*" When, for a few moments I was forc'd to leave him, to gather up some sheets of one of his Manuscripts, which I fear'd would be lost.—Sally said to him, my dear Master, do you know *me*? he reply'd "Sally—God will put his right hand under you." She added, O my dear Master, should you be taken away what a disconsolate creature will my poor dear Mistress be. He reply'd "*God will be her all in all.*" He had always delighted much in these words,

"Jesus's blood thro' earth and skies,

"Mercy, free, boundless mercy cries."

And whenever I repeated them to him, would answer *boundless boundless boundless!* and in allusion to them, he now reply'd tho' with great difficulty,

"Mercy's full power I soon shall prove

"Lov'd with an everlasting Love."

On Saturday afternoon his Fever seem'd quite off, and a few Christian Friends standing near the bed, he reach'd his hand to each of them, and looking on a Minister, who was weeping by him, he said, "are you ready to assist To-morrow?" which recollection of his amazed us much, as the day of the Week had not been nam'd in his room. Most about him could not but believe he was better, and would get over it. One said, do you think that the Lord will raise you up? — He strove to answer, saying, "raise in resur... raise in resur..." meaning in the resurrection. To another who ask'd the same question, he said, "*I leave it all to God.*"

In the Evening his Fever return'd, with violence,
and

and the Mucus falling on the Windpipe occasion'd him to be almost strangled. He suffer'd greatly, and it was supposed, the same painful emotion would continue and grow more violent to the last. This I felt most *exquisitely*, and cry'd to the Lord to remove it, and glory be to his name he did; and from that time it return'd no more in that way. As night drew on, I thought I perceiv'd him dying very fast; his fingers could now hardly move to make the sign (which he seem'd scarce ever to forget) and his speech, as it seem'd, was quite gone. I said, my dear Creature, I ask not for myself, *I know thy Soul*, but for the sake of others; if Jesus is very present with thee, lift thy right hand; he did—I added, if the prospect of glory sweetly opens before thee, repeat the sign. He then rais'd it again—and in half a minute a second time, then threw it up with all his remaining strength, as if he would reach the top of the bed. After this his dear hands moved no more; but on my saying “art thou in much pain?” He answer'd, *No*. From this time he enter'd into a state that might be called a kind of sleep, tho' with eyes open and fixt, and his hands utterly void of any motion. For the most part he sat upright against pillows, with his head a little inclin'd to one side, and so remarkably composed and triumphant was his Countenance, that the least trace of death was scarcely discernible in it.

Twenty-four hours, my dearly beloved was in this situation, breathing like a Person in common-sleep.—About 35 minutes past Ten on Sunday Night August 14th, his precious Soul enter'd into the joy of the Lord, without one struggle or groan,—in the 56th year of his age.

Often

Often he had said when hearing of happy deaths—well, let us get holy lives, and we will leave the rest to God—but I can truly say, who was scarce a minute at a time from him night or day, that there was the strongest reason to believe

“No Cloud did arise, to darken his skies,

“Or hide for one moment his Lord from his eyes.”

And here, I break off my mournful story; I could say abundance more, but on my bleeding heart his fair Picture of heavenly excellence will be forever drawn.—When I call to mind his ardent zeal, his laborious endeavours to seek and save the lost—his diligence in the employment of his time—his Christlike condescension towards me, and his uninterrupted converse with Heaven, I may well be allow'd to add, my loss is beyond the power of words to paint. O Sir, you know I have trodden deep waters but *all my afflictions were nothing compar'd to this.* Well; I want no pleasant prospect, but upwards—nor any thing whereon to fix my hope, but *immortality.*

On the 17th his dear remains were deposited in Madeley Church-yard; amid the Tears and Lamentations of Thousands, who flock'd about the bier of their dead Pastor. Between the House and Church they sung these Verses.

With heavenly Weapons, he hath fought

The Battles of the Lord;

Finish'd his course, and kept the faith,

And gain'd the great Reward.

God hath laid up in heaven for him,

A Crown which cannot fade;

The

The righteous Judge at that great day,
Shall place it on his head.

The Service was perform'd by the Rev. Mr. HATTON Rector of Waters-Upton, whom the Lord mov'd, in a pathetic manner, to speak to his Weeping flock on the sad occasion. In the conclusion at my request he read the following Paper.

AS it was the desire of my beloved husband to be buried in this plain manner, so out of tenderness he begg'd that I might not be present; and in all things I would obey him.

Permit me then to take this opportunity, by the mouth of a Friend, to bear my open testimony to the glory of God, that I who have known him, in the most perfect manner, am constrain'd to declare, I never knew any one walk so closely in the ways of God as he did.—The Lord gave him a conscience tender as the apple of an Eye. He literally prefer'd the interest of every one to his own. He was rigidly just but perfectly loose from all attachment to the World. He shar'd *his all* with the poor, who lay so close to his heart, that on the approach of Death, tho' his speech was so gone he could utter nothing without difficulty, he cry'd out, "O my Poor! what will become of my poor! I am dead to my Poor!"—He was blest with so great a degree of humility as is scarcely to be found.—I am witness how often he has taken a real pleasure in being treated with contempt; indeed it seem'd the very food of his soul to be little and unknown. When he said to me, "thou wilt write a line or two to my Brother in Switzerland if I die." I replying, my dear

dear Love, I will write him all the Lord's dealings with thee.—“No no,” said he, “Write nothing about me—I only desire to be forgotten—God is all.”

His zeal for souls I need not tell to *you*, let the labour of twenty-five years, and a Martyr's death in the conclusion imprint it on your hearts.—His diligent visitation of the Sick laid, to appearance, the foundation of the Spotted Fever, which by God's commission, tore him from you and me: and his vehement desire to take his last leave of *you*, with dying lips and hands, gave (it is supposed) the finishing stroke, by preparing his blood for Putrefaction.—Thus hath he lived and died your Servant.—*and will any of you refuse to meet him at Gods right hand in that day?*

He walk'd with death always in sight and about two months ago, he came to me one day and said. “My dear Love, I know not how it is, but I have a strange impression death is very near us, as if it would be some sudden stroke upon one of us; and it draws out all my soul in prayer that we may be ready.” He then broke out, “*Lord prepare the soul thou wilt call; and O stand by the poor disconsolate one who shall be left behind.*”

A few days before his departure he was fill'd with Love in an uncommon manner, saying to me.—“I have had such a discovery of the depth of that word, *God is Love*, as I cannot tell thee half, but it fills me, it fills me, O Polly! my dear Polly, *God is Love!* shout his praise; I want a *gust of praise* to reach to the ends of the Earth.” And the same he testified as long as he had voice and continued to testify to the End, by a most *Lamblike patience*, in which

which he victoriously smiled over death, and let his last seal to the glorious truths he had so long preach'd among you.

Three years nine months and two days I have possessed my heavenly-minded husband; but now, the sun of my earthly joy is set forever, and my soul fill'd with an anguish, which only finds its consolation, in a total abandonment and resignation to the will of God: An exercise to which my dear creature and I had of late been particularly drawn. When I was asking the Lord, if he pleased to spare him to me a little longer, the following answer was impress'd on my mind with great power, and in the accomplishment of this word of Promise I look for our reunion. "Where I am there shall my servants be, that they may be hold my Glory." Lord hasten the hour.

As the applications for some account of Gods dealings with my beloved husband, were so numerous, that I could not comply with them all, I have given the copy of this Letter to his old friend WILFRED EDMUNDS, whose Son Prints it for the satisfaction of many. I consider this also as a debt I owe to his dear Orphans of Madeley, to whom it is particularly address'd; and as it is probable I may be call'd away by the same Fever, perhaps this may be the last office of love I can yield them.

If it shou'd be a Blessing to any, praised be the Lord; I ask in return their prayers, that the Spirit which so abundantly rested on my dear departed husband, may in some degree be pour'd out on his poor disconsolate Widow,

MARY FLETCHER.

15 JY 64